

*With millions set to travel for Labor Day weekend, Israel calls on TSA to investigate risks*

Islip, NY— Today, Congressman Steve Israel (D-Huntington) warned New Yorkers of potential health risks when entering full-body Backscatter X-ray scanners at airport security, especially for young children and pregnant women. Currently, nearly 250 of these scanners are being used at 37 airports across the country. With millions of Americans preparing to travel by air for the Labor Day holiday weekend, Rep. Israel sent a letter to the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) asking them to launch an independent study on the Backscatter X-ray full-body scanners.

Rep. Israel said, “While using X-ray scanners at airports is important to detect those who pose potential risks to our safety, we must not use these scanners at the expense of our health. I am encouraging flyers to be aware of the possible risks, especially for young children and pregnant women. I am also calling on the TSA to immediately perform a complete investigation of Backscatter machines. ”

Dr. Ken Spaeth, Medical Director of the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Center at the North Shore-LIJ Health System, joined Rep. Israel.

Dr. Spaeth said, “The absence of independent safety studies is one reason the scanners are controversial. Further complicating the issue is that security concerns preclude the release of information on how these work and details on the radiation they emit. There is also a void in the medical literature on the effects of low-dose ionizing radiation.

The Backscatter X-ray machine uses a narrowly focused beam of high-intensity radiation which moves quickly across the body. While some experts believe that these scanners expose passengers to low doses of radiation, other experts question this rationale and cite that access to the machines for further evaluation is limited. Much of the inner workings of the machines have been kept secret due to security concerns.

The Transportation Security Administration has said that, while these scanners have been

evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration, the United States Army Public Health Command, and the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, researchers from these institutions have not necessarily had direct access to the scanners. Citing safety concerns, the European Union has banned Backscatter X-ray machines.

Additionally, in an August 6th article in the New York Times, John Sedat, emeritus professor of biochemistry and biophysics at the University of California, San Francisco, stated that he believes that the effective dose could be 45 times as high as the T.S.A. has estimated, equivalent to about 10 percent of a single chest X-ray.

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